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Committee on Information
Thirty-second session
26 April-7 May 2010
Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session

Draft report

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I. Introduction

1. In its resolution 34/182, the General Assembly decided to maintain the Committee to Review United Nations Public Information Policies and Activities, established by its resolution 33/115 C, which would be known as the Committee on Information, and to increase its membership from 41 to 66. In section I, paragraph 2, of resolution 34/182, the Assembly requested the Committee:

> "(a) To continue to examine United Nations public information policies and activities, in the light of the evolution of international relations, particularly during the past two decades, and of the imperatives of the establishment of the new international economic order and of a new world information and communication order;
>
> "(b) To evaluate and follow up the efforts made and the progress achieved by the United Nations system in the field of information and communications;
>
> "(c) To promote the establishment of a new, more just and more effective world information and communication order intended to strengthen peace and international understanding and based on the free circulation and wider and better balanced dissemination of information and to make recommendations thereon to the General Assembly"

and requested the Committee and the Secretary-General to report to it at its thirty-fifth session.

2. In its resolution 35/201, the General Assembly expressed its satisfaction with the work of the Committee, approved its report and the recommendations of its Ad Hoc Working Group, reaffirmed the mandate given to the Committee in its resolution 34/182 and decided to increase the membership of the Committee from 66 to 67. At its organizational session in 1980, the Committee agreed that the principle of geographical rotation would be applied to all the officers of the Committee and that they should be elected for two-year terms of office.

3. The General Assembly, from its thirty-sixth to sixty-third sessions, took note of the reports of the Committee and adopted consensus resolutions. At its sixty-fourth session, the Assembly took note of the report of the Committee and adopted consensus resolutions 64/96 A and B.

4. Currently the Committee is composed of the following Member States:

Algeria	Bangladesh
Angola	Belarus
Antigua and Barbuda	Belgium
Argentina	Belize
Armenia	Benin
Austria	Brazil
Azerbaijan	Bulgaria

Burkina Faso
Burundi
Cape Verde
Chile
China
Colombia
Congo
Costa Rica
Côte d'Ivoire
Croatia
Cuba
Cyprus
Czech Republic
Democratic People's Republic of Korea
Democratic Republic of the Congo
Denmark
Dominican Republic
Ecuador
Egypt
El Salvador
Ethiopia
Finland
France
Gabon
Georgia
Germany
Ghana
Greece
Guatemala
Guinea
Guyana
Hungary
Iceland
India
Indonesia
Iran (Islamic Republic of)
Ireland
Israel
Italy
Jamaica
Japan
Jordan
Kazakhstan
Kenya
Lebanon
Liberia
Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Luxembourg
Madagascar
Malta
Mexico
Monaco
Mozambique
Nepal
Netherlands
Niger
Nigeria
Pakistan
Peru
Philippines

Poland
Portugal
Qatar
Republic of Korea
Republic of Moldova
Romania
Russian Federation
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines
Saudi Arabia
Senegal
Sierra Leone
Singapore
Slovakia
Solomon Islands
Somalia
South Africa
Spain
Sri Lanka
Sudan
Suriname
Switzerland
Syrian Arab Republic
Thailand
Togo
Trinidad and Tobago
Tunisia
Turkey
Ukraine
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
United Republic of Tanzania
United States of America
Uruguay
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)
Viet Nam
Yemen
Zambia
Zimbabwe

II. Organizational questions

A. Opening of the session

5. The organizational meeting of the thirty-second session of the Committee on Information was held on 26 April 2010 at United Nations Headquarters. The session was opened by the Chair of the Committee, Antonio Pedro Monteiro Lima (Cape Verde).

B. Election of officers

6. Following the departure of Irakli Chikovani (Georgia), Vice-Chair, from the Permanent Mission of Georgia to the United Nations, Shalva Tsiskarashvili (Georgia) was elected to serve as a Vice-Chair for the remainder of the 2009-2010 term. The officers of the Committee on Information for the period 2009-2010 are as follows:

Chair:

Antonio Pedro Monteiro Lima (Cape Verde)

Vice-Chair:

Stéphane Crouzat (France)
Amir Hossein Hosseini (Islamic Republic of Iran)
Shalva Tsiskarashvili (Georgia)

Rapporteur:

Sheree Chambers (Jamaica)

C. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work

7. At its organizational meeting on 26 April, the Committee adopted the following agenda and programme of work (A/AC.198/2010/1):

1. Opening of the session.
2. Election of officers.
3. Adoption of the agenda and programme of work.
4. Admission of new members.
5. Statement by the Chair.
6. Statement by the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information.
7. General debate.
8. Consideration of reports submitted by the Secretary-General.
9. Open-ended working group of the Committee on Information.
10. Consideration and adoption of the report of the Committee to the General Assembly at its sixty-fifth session.

8. The Committee held its general debate from 26 to 28 April 2010. On 26 April, in the afternoon, the Department of Public Information, led by its Under-Secretary-General, held an interactive dialogue with Member States.

9. For its consideration of agenda item 8, the Committee had before it the following documents:

(a) Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Public Information: strategic communications services (A/AC.198/2010/2);

(b) Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Public Information: news services (A/AC.198/2010/3);

(c) Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Department of Public Information: outreach services (A/AC.198/2010/4);

In addition, the Committee considered the proposed strategic framework for the period 2012-2013 (A/65/6 (Prog. 23)).

D. Observers

10. The Holy See, Palestine and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization participated in the session as observers.

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Chapter III

General debate

Rapporteur: Sheree **Chambers** (Jamaica)

1. Statements in the general debate were made by the following States members of the Committee on Information: Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Bangladesh, Benin, Brazil, Chile (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Rio Group), China, Cuba, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Israel, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, Senegal, Spain (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the European Union), the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Tunisia, the United States of America, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Yemen (on behalf of the States Members of the United Nations that are members of the Group of 77 and China) and Zambia. The representative of the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine, in its capacity as observer, also made a statement. The general debate was preceded by statements made by the Chair of the Committee and the Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat.

2. In taking up the substantive questions before the Committee, speakers emphasized the central role of the United Nations in global affairs and of the Department of Public Information as its public voice. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a large group, said that his group believed that close cooperation and partnership between the Department and the Committee on Information had always been the cornerstone of the Department's public information policy. Describing the Department as a public voice to promote the purposes and

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image of the United Nations, he called for the strengthening of the partnership. The Organization was a universal forum where the world community could hold debates on many concerns. Many countries, however, especially in the developing world, lacked the resources and the technical means to access information on United Nations activities and achievements. The Department therefore had a challenging task in reaching the widest possible audience on issues of particular interest to the Group. Such issues, according to the speaker, included: decolonization; peacekeeping; disarmament; human rights; sustainable development; poverty eradication; climate change; the Millennium Development Goals; dialogue among civilizations; the follow-up to the World Summit on the Information Society; and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD).

3. Another speaker, also addressing the Committee on behalf of a large group, said that the mission of the Department was to broaden understanding of the work of the United Nations among the widest possible audiences. The role of the Department, and consequently that of the Committee on Information, was to reach the international public with information on challenges that could be jointly identified and measures that everyone could agree on.

4. One speaker, representing a large group, noted that the members of his group widely recognized the valuable efforts of the Department in promoting and achieving a better understanding of the objectives and the work of the United Nations on a variety of issues of high importance and interest to the international community. Another speaker acknowledged that the Department had helped to make many United Nations activities a resounding success. Her country continued to encourage the head of the Department to identify ways to improve coordination, efficiency and integration of public information activities throughout the Organization, and welcomed his efforts to achieve "the greatest public impact with the greatest efficiency".

5. Several speakers discussed the role of new information and communications technology, including new media, in promoting the work of the United Nations. One speaker remarked that information was no longer bound by traditional borders, which was why his country supported the Department's expansion into new mediums and technologies. According to another speaker, while the dizzying revolution of information and communications technology had greatly contributed to understanding of United Nations endeavours, "it was necessary to strike a balance between traditional and new communications media so as not to accentuate disparities between the North and South". He emphasized that in Africa, vast segments of society drew no benefit from the rise in new technologies, and for this reason, the Digital Solidarity Fund, the main instrument for closing the North-South digital divide, should have greater visibility. Another speaker called for the establishment of a new world order of information for the purpose of creating a fairer and more equitable world based on mutual respect underpinned by United Nations principles. Disseminating a culture of peace, tolerance and dialogue between civilizations in bringing about and maintaining peace was particularly important. Another speaker, while supporting the continued advance of information and communications technologies, suggested that "a code of conduct" should be designed to regulate information flows, "because media could be misused as a tool for expansionist policies and the promotion of certain cultures to the detriment of others". Another speaker stated that his group emphasized the importance of continuing the use of traditional media in disseminating the main messages of the

United Nations as this was still the primary means of communication in many developing countries.

6. Several speakers emphasized the importance of freedom of the press and the freedom of expression. One speaker, representing a large group of countries, observed that it was of paramount importance for all Member States to adhere to their commitments to guarantee full respect for the freedom of expression and access to information and to ensure the unhindered freedom of the press. Another speaker, noting that 3 May was World Press Freedom Day, emphasized that it was important for the Committee to recall article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which affirmed the right of everyone to freedom of expression, including the freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

7. Many speakers emphasized the need for achieving linguistic parity in the work of the Department. One speaker, speaking on behalf of a large group, pointed out that the Secretary-General in his report to the Committee had acknowledged that there was a possibility of a growing gap in the use of Spanish on the United Nations website as compared to English. Noting that one of the most important goals for his group was to achieve parity among the six official languages, he called for the dissemination of information, particularly over the radio, in as many languages as possible, including Portuguese. Another speaker, echoing these sentiments, noted that in order to ensure that people were reached all over the world, it was important for the United Nations to broadcast information, not just in the six official languages, but also in other languages. Another speaker observed that in order to achieve parity among the official United Nations languages, the Arabic section should be placed on equal footing with the others through a strengthening of its work. He also expressed deep concern about the decline in the use of Arabic, particularly in radio broadcasts, as those were an important tool in disseminating the Organization's media messages in villages, communities and regions that did not have access to complex technical media. One speaker also lauded the United Nations information centres for producing information in some 80 local languages and United Nations Radio for producing programmes in Bangla, Hindi and Urdu, among other languages.

8. Several speakers underscored the importance of closer cooperation between the Department of Public Information, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support. One speaker, noting that his country was the largest troop-contributing country, said that while peacekeeping was challenging it also had success stories which should be shared with the world. Another speaker, acknowledging the Department's work in promoting the work of United Nations peacekeeping, called for sustained and improved effort to more effectively communicate to the public, particularly in troop-contributing countries, the important role of peacekeepers in maintaining the peace in conflict areas. Another speaker, also calling for a sustained focus on peacekeeping operations, noted that the Department's increased communications capability had helped to inform Member States of Haiti's needs after the earthquake and had guided the participation of Member States in the response. He also lauded the Department for coming out with a steady stream of media releases targeting audiences in more than 30 troop-contributing countries.

9. Several speakers commented on the Department's special information programme on the question of Palestine. One speaker, representing a large group, said the programme was meaningful to his Group. Commending the Department's annual training programme for Palestinian media professionals from the Occupied Palestinian Territory, he reiterated the need for the continuation of those and other activities, and called for their further enhancement. One speaker noted that until recently the "Question of Palestine" had been a distinct link on the United Nations home page, but it had been removed and replaced by the "Situation in the Middle East" on the home page, news pages and news focus pages. He hoped the Department would consider restoring the original link on the United Nations home page. Another speaker encouraged the Department to keep addressing the plight of Palestinians, bearing in mind the suffering of those people.

10. Most speakers commended the work of United Nations information centres and called for their operations to be strengthened. One speaker, addressing the Committee on behalf of a large group, noted that his Group saw the information centres as vital entities in bridging the gap between developed and developing countries in terms of access to information and communications technology. The Group underlined that any decision pertaining to the reorganization of the centres must be made in close consultation with host countries and must take account of the geographical, linguistic and technological characters and needs of different regions.

11. Another speaker, also representing a large group, welcomed steps taken towards cooperation among the United Nations information centres worldwide, which held a promise of savings without limiting capacity to pay attention to local specifics. In that regard, he looked forward to seeing further progress in multilingual activities of the information centres. He noted that the current capacity of the centres in disseminating information in local languages was an impressive example and should be built on in a cost-effective manner, including through partnerships with non-governmental organizations and academic institutions. Several speakers also welcomed the establishment of a centre in Luanda to address the needs of Portuguese-speaking African countries. According to one speaker, the establishment of the centre would be an important stimulus to peace consolidation in Angola, and could also serve to strengthen democracy and battle poverty and social exclusion.

12. The budgetary constraints faced by the United Nations information centres were also addressed by some speakers. One speaker, calling upon the Department to "strengthen, and not weaken" the information centres, emphasized that adequate budgetary resources must be made available to strengthen public outreach and ensure the effective functioning of the network. Another speaker encouraged all Member States in a position to do so to offer rent-free premises for the information centres.